

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL  
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY  
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

SHIFTING GEARS PROJECT  
NORTH ADAMS

**INFORMANT: ELLIE COLLINS**

**INTERVIEWER: SUSAN GILLOOLY**

**DATE: MAY 16, 1989**

**PLACE: NORTH ADAMS STATE COLLEGE**

**S = SUSAN**

**E = ELLIE**

**SG-NA-T010**

Susan Gillooly interviewing Ellie Collins at North Adams State College on May 16, 1989 for the Shifting Gears Project dealing with Mass MoCA.

S: Okay Ellie, where were you born?

E: I was born in the Ganya Guam, which is an island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

S: Why born there and not in the United States?

E: My father was in the military during Vietnam and he was stationed in Guam. And so my mom went over. And we were there. I was born there and then ten months after that we came back to Albany. But he was just stationed there, so.

S: Were your parents born in North Adams, or Williams (--)

E: My dad was born in North Adams and my mom was born in Montreal, but she was adopted. So she lived here all of her life.

S: Okay. Okay, uh, let's see. Where were your parents (--) Your parents were born in?

E: My dad was born here. And my mom came here like only a week after she was adopted. So they both were like here the whole time and they grew up here.

S: Okay. Let's see. Okay, um, how about your parent's background and your grandparents? Do you know?

E: My grand (--) Well let's see. Two of my grandparents lived here all their lives, like one set of grandparents lived here. But um, I don't really know much about them. Like my grandfather worked in Sprague's for awhile, but then they had layoffs at some point and so he got laid off then. And then he liked opened his own business and he and my grandmother just like ran that together. And that's all! That's all I really know about them!

And then my other grandparents, my grandmother is from Pittsfield and my grandfather is from here. And all he tells me about is like when he was a little boy. I guess his father liked owned like a milk place, or something like that. And when he was a little boy he used to have to like take like all of the dairy products and stuff and walk with a cart from house to house and like deliver all of the stuff. And then like walk to school. He told me that. And um, I guess then he opened up like a, a little, I guess you'd call it a variety store. Just like a little market type place. And um, he just did that forever. And my grandmother worked mostly at the college I guess for about twenty-years.

S: The State College?

E: Yeah, at the State College. She just retired liked a few years ago. She worked here.

S: And your parents? Like what did they do when they got back?

E: Um, oh, my parents, well they grew up here and they like went to school at Drury. And then they both went to U Mass for college. And um, it's kind of like, it's a weird story, because like they started off they were here. And then my dad got stationed at Guam, so they moved there. And then he had the option to stay in Guam for one more year and get out of the service, or come to Albany for two years. So he came to Albany and he stayed there for two years. And then they moved to Virginia, [Chuckles] and they were there for a year. And um, what it came down to is like if he wanted to like move up in the company and move further away, or if he wanted to come back to North Adams. And they decided to come back here. When I was four we came, we came here. And he like, he bought part of this insurance agency. Not the one he's in now, but he bought part of an insurance agency and that's why they came back. So we've been here since I was four. So it's like what, fourteen years.

S: And your mother?

E: My mom teaches now. She did nothing for a very long time. [Chuckles] I guess she was like the classic housewife. Like she did all of the charity stuff. You know, like the United Way. And she did all of the fund drive stuff. And now she teaches at school. She teaches English. And um, she's on the Bank Board at the First Agie Bank, but she doesn't really do much. She considers that more of a hobby [laughs] than anything else. She just like goes to the meetings and that's about it.

S: Do your parents like what they do now, or?

E: Yeah. My dad, it's weird, because my dad he had that little agency and then what he did was he took that agency and he like sold it to the bigger agencies. And now, so that now he's like a fourth owner of the big one. And um, he likes it, because he gets to do all sorts of different stuff.

You know, he's the president of it now. And so he gets basically to do whatever he wants. [Chuckles] And, but he's, I guess he's worked really hard, because when he was younger he was never home. I mean we (--) He got home really late at night and stuff, because he worked you know, really late. But now, now you know, he's like established. So he you know, can do whatever he wants.

S: Did that affect you any with him being gone?

E: I don't know. It's kind of hard to explain, because I was kind of little when he wasn't really around that much. And then when I got older he was there all the time. So it was, it was, it was kind of like I was so used to it before that it was just like great that he was there. It wasn't a big deal that he wasn't there, because he never was. [Chuckles] So. And then like now he does all of the development corps stuff. Trying to bring new business into the area. And um, he's, he's on that board, because I guess, I don't know, I guess all they try and do is they try to recruit different industries and stuff to come here. And they like send video tapes and stuff like that to people like to try to invest in the area, and stuff like that. He does that too. But that's, he doesn't get paid for that. That's just like a bunch of businessmen get together [laughs] and they do these things. I don't know.

S: Why of all places did he develop an agency, North Adams, it's such a small town?

E: Well um, when it (--) This is also a weird story, but [laughs]. When he came back he bought this insurance agency from my mother's uncle. And it was kind of like a dead agency. [Laughs] And he bought it just because my parents thought that this area would be a good place to raise my sister and I. And because they thought you know, it was a small place and it was like sheltered. And they thought it would be a good place to you know, be brought up and everything. So that's why they came back. And um, the agency did nothing for years. I mean like we had nothing. We had like no money, or you know, and no house. We had nothing. [Laughs] And uh, and um, and so it did, it really was bad. And then when he got in the new agency, it's really weird, because like his great great grandfather or something owned it. [Laughs] And I don't know, but um, so he got in the new one. And um, and they basically, they served most of Berkshire County. It's not just North Adams. They don't, they have like an office in Williamstown. And they have one in Adams now. That's new. But, and it's just North Adams based, but they do like all sorts of stuff in Berkshire County. And I guess since there are so few here, they do really well. Because there isn't much competition. Like if they were in a big city I don't know if they would do as well. But [S: because there's other (--)] yeah. But since they're like the biggest agency in such a small place, they do really well. So. But it kind, it's grown, it's grown a lot. It used to be small, really small, but it's grown a lot, expanded. I don't know.

S: Do you work?

E: Uh, sometimes. I babysit in the afternoons. And um, but usually I don't work during school. And this summer, this summer I'm going to work at Michael's Pizza, [laughs] in Williamstown. It ought to be great. But um, but the only time I worked other than that was two summers ago, I worked at [Tukanek?] Golf Course on the grounds crew. Meet interesting people when you work on the grounds crew, because I don't know, they're kind of crazy. They're different people.

Like you know, they run big machines and things. And they're awesome, they're so nice. It's you know, they're great, but you'd never run into them. You know, it's not like those type of people you'd meet at a social setting, or anything like that. [Laughs] But um, they were really really nice, you know. And that was in Williamstown. So I got to meet you know, more Williamstown people from that. But (--)

S: Why is it that you don't work during school? Is it because of the academics?

E: It's mostly like academics and sports. Because um, up until this year I got hurt. That's why I don't play sports this year. But um, up until this year I played soccer in the fall. Then I skied in the winter and played softball in the summer, or in the spring. And so there wasn't really any time to work unless I decided to totally trash my school work. [Chuckles] So I decided to keep the school work and can work. But this year since I don't play softball, because of my knee, I've been babysitting like three times a week. And that's just after school for a few hours.

S: Okay. Uh, what about religious background? How does that affect maybe your up-bringing? Like your parents and (--)

E: Well you're going to think I'm really strange, because this is weird. [Both laugh] But um, my mother is, my mom is Jewish and my dad is protestant. He's a congregationalist. And um, and I've been raised as a protestant. So um, I go to church. I go to church almost every Sunday. And you know, I went through the Sunday school and you know, Confirmation and the whole big deal with that. And um, and so basically my religious beliefs are all like protestant. They're all based in that. But my grandparents, my mother's parents who are Jewish only lived two houses down from me until last year. So um, basically I spent all of my time in like a Jewish household. So I got to experience both. And I think, my grandfather was really religious. Like he went to Synagogue like everyday. And he was you know, he was crazy. [Laughs] He went to Synagogue all of the time. And um, it was really important to them, but mostly like we just, we would like go through the holidays more like out of respect for them than true belief in what they were doing. Because we, you know, we would do Christmas and Easter and all of that in my house.

S: Christmas, the Jewish, or?

E: We'd (--) All right. Christmas is the protestant holiday. And like I guess the comparable thing would be Hanukkah, which is during December, which is (--) So I'd get the best of both worlds. I mean I'd get presents for you know, everything. [Laughs] But I think it was really good for me, because I got to experience everything. And it's like one of those things where you know, you hear people talking about like Jewish people and they'll make a comment or something. And you know, I have a name. You know, my name Collins. I mean that's so British. [Laughs] You know, it's protestant. It's just you know, like one of those names. So no one expects me to have like that type of background. So I think I see a lot of different things that you know, people would hide from someone, but they don't realize that you know, my mom's Jewish, or whatever. So I hear everything. And I think I'm really just, I don't know, I think I just have a better understanding of like different religions. And just how it's okay to be whatever you want to be and all of that. I think that's been good about the way I was brought up.

S: Okay. Okay. Uh, after high school what do you plan to (--) Are you going to college?

E: Yeah. I'm going to go to [Boden?] College in Maine.

S: Do you know what you're going to be getting into, or?

E: Um, I guess I have an idea. I'm not positive. I think um, I think I'll be a political science major. And um, I might get into some psychology while I'm there, but it will be basically like social sciences and english. Things like that.

S: Why is it leaned towards?

E: I think, I think I want to be a lawyer. And um, and so, but I don't want to be pre-law, because I want to have like a broader background. And so um, at least I figure while I'm at college I can study languages and things like that. And um, just have a broad base. Because you can get into law school. You don't have to take pre-law to get into law school. You can take anything. So I think I'll, I think I'll do that hopefully. [Chuckles]

S: Do you think you'll be living around here after college?

E: I think (--) It's weird, because like Boden's a really small school. I mean tiny, tiny little school. And um, I chose it because I like that small like atmosphere. But I think when I go to law school I'm going to choose a big school so that I can experience everything. If I have to guess I'd probably say that right when I get out of law school I'll be near a city. Like you know, Boston or whatever. And um, I think that I'll probably like try and get myself built up while I'm near a city and try and do different types of things. Like right now I don't know what kind of law I want to do. I have like these two different things. Like I could do like criminal law. And then what I'd probably do is stay near a city, because there isn't too much need for a criminal lawyer at a place like North Adams. [Laughs] But um, if I do corporate law I would probably try to use like a language background and do it from a city. And try and do international type law. But what I could do with that is I could move from that to a smaller area, and then just kind of tone it down a bit. I'd like to experience everything while I'm young. And then like when I get older, come to an area more like this. A smaller area.

S: And uh, like your parents, they've raised you in a small town, [E: umhm] because they thought it would be better for you. [E: Right] Uh, do you think, it's a little far ahead in the future here, but if you have kids do you think you'll also be like raising them in a small (--)

E: I would much rather raise them in a small town like North Adams.

S: Rather than the city?

E: Because um, well this summer I went to school in Boston. Well right outside of Boston. And some of the kids were from Boston. And I mean there yards were like just these little itty bitty tiny little yards. And you know, they have no, they don't even have like places to go play,

you know. It's like you know, they don't have like baseball fields and stuff like that. And I mean my house, you can walk out the front door and there's this lawn and you know, you can do whatever you want. And um, and I think like also that growing up here, I don't know, I think you know so many more people in a close sense. Like you know, you go to a little elementary school and you know, you have twenty-five kids in your class, but those twenty-five kids are like you know, such good friends to you. And even in our high school. I mean we have a hundred and fifty kids in our class, but you know, I know almost everyone. And I know a lot of other grades too, which I don't know if that would happen like if I was in a big school. You know, I'd probably only know a little itty bitty segment of what was happening. I'd rather have my kids grown up in an area that was like more tranquil. [Laughs] Like this.

S: Uh, so many people view North Adams as very negative. What are your views? I mean like the people in North Adams. I mean it's known for low poverty.

E: Well I can tell you a little story about this too. Like um, when I was in middle school age, which is sixth to eighth grade, I went to Pine Coble, which is in Williamstown. Which is you know, is kind of the um, elite section of Berkshire County. [Laughs] You know, live in Williamstown. And um, I came from North Adams. And everybody thought that North Adams was the worst place in the entire world. And I mean, it was awful. For the first couple of months I hated going to school there, because I just (--) Well first of all I hated leaving my friends, but beyond that I was just like all of these people are snobs. And they look down upon where I live. And I thought it was awful. And um, and then like when I got to be friends with all of those people all I wanted to do was get out. I was like I want to live in Williamstown, because all of my friends are here. And I don't want to you know, live in North Adams. And it was (--) My parents wanted to move anyway, because our house was too small. And um, so they were deciding whether to build a house in Williamstown, or to build a house in North Adams. And um, and they decided to stay in North Adams. And I think it was probably the best move they ever made, because I think that people from other areas, like and particular, Williamstown, just because it's right next door, have a distorted view of what the real world is like.

S: People in Williamstown?

E: Yeah, I think so, because um, in North Adams you know, a lot of people are poor, but I think there's like a much broader based population. I mean we're (--) I mean we have kids in our class who are you know, really really well off and we have other kids who are you know, really poor. And that's what you experience if you go to the real world. And it's not you know, the sunshine and roses that most of the people in a richer community would like to believe. And I think that they were downing the community for the wrong reasons. I mean, just because someone doesn't have a lot of money, doesn't make them a lousy person. And it doesn't make them a you know, undeserving person either. It might just be a bad situation. And I guess because I've gone to school in both places and I've met you know, both types of people, I've realized that I'd much rather live in a community like North Adams and have a realistic view of what's going on, than live in a richer community and be sheltered to what you know, the real world is like.

S: But did you like going to school better in Williamstown than in North Adams?

E: I liked it better, but it wasn't because it was Williamstown. It was because of the school. It was a private school and the classes were about half the size of a public school. And the activities were like you know, go skiing on two days a week and things like that. Where in middle school, you have like little [unclear] sports. And at Pine Coble we had a field hockey team. I mean we traveled all over you know, Vermont and we went down to Massachusetts and we'd go all over. And um, it was just, it was just a different school. But um, I don't think that I would have enjoyed going to the Williamstown public school any better than I would enjoy you know, going to Drury.

S: Okay. Uh, let's see. If there were any way you could have improved North Adams how would it be? Or what would it be?

E: I think one thing I'd improve is the attitude of the people who live here.

S: That's hard to change though.

E: It is. I guess if I was God [laughs] you know, or something and I could do whatever I wanted with the people who lived here, I think I would put them all in one huge building and give them a lecture on having a better self image. Because I think that a lot of people in North Adams think that they're stuck here and that they can't get out. And I think that's a really lousy attitude to take. And I think basically from the stand point of they just don't think that there's anything better waiting for them, or even if there was they don't think they could have it, just because of where they come from. And you know, I'd use my dad as an example. When my dad was growing up in North Adams he was really, really poor. And he, you know, and he describes it to me now about you know, how everything he got was hand-me-downs and all of that type of stuff. And he went to U Mass which was a state school. And then after that he just started moving up and up, and up and up, and up and up. And now you know, we're in a very good situation. And so anyone who says that it can't be done is full of garbage as far as I'm concerned. Because if you try hard enough I think you can. So I think I'd probably take all of the people and tell them that and try and convince them that that's true.

S: It's kind of hard to convince someone who's like maybe already in their twenties, or thirties about their attitudes and everything, because of the way they were brought up. You know? [E: Umhm] But don't you think it would be start from the bottom, like younger, younger children on the way up like?

E: I think there's, there's two things. First of all um, if you want to change the attitude of older people I think that things like the IDC, which is the Industrial Development Corporation trying to bring new business into the area. I think that things like that help, because if we can get more people to say well, the area is worthwhile and you know, we'll go there, than that provides more jobs which gives the older people a better self image anyway. Like wow, you know, I'm getting a better job now and look at this. you know, the area is turning around and I have more opportunity and I'll do better.

Another thing is like I think that kids in school I think should be pushed to do the best that they can possibly do. Because I think that if they take that attitude while they're in school, they'll end up having that attitude when they get out. You know, so if they you know, if it's a, if it's a

smart kid you know, push them to take honors classes. Or if it's , or if the person isn't smart, but happens to be really good with their hands or something, push them to be really good at whatever, you know, whatever their good at. You know, whether it'd be like fixing a car, or painting a picture. You know, just pushing to be good at whatever they can be. And then they'll have a better self image and they'll probably work harder when they get out.

S: There's been a lot of talk about Mass MoCA coming into the area. How do you think that will affect the people around North Adams? Or how do you think it will help, or do you think it will?

E: Um, I think that Mass MoCA is probably the best thing that could possibly happen to the area, or has happened in an incredibly long time. Um, number one, it's got basis in Williams College, which is a pretty good place to start. I mean it's a quality project and it will do very well. And it will be a huge museum, which will be not only a national [unclear], but an international one. It will be the largest international museum of contemporary art. And um, I think that that in itself just brings about this whole new attitude about North Adams. It's just like wow!. You know, we've gone from this mill town, which was (--) I mean we were a pretty booming town when we were you know, like late 1800's, early 1900's when we had all of the factories and everything. And I think that we've from this like great town to this lousy you know, economically, depressed, pathetic place. [Both laugh] And um, and then the museum comes in. And I think it's going to change everything. First of all, I think it's going to bring in so much more industry. The museum, fine, that brings in tourists. And there will be tons and tons of tourist associated industries, whether they be maybe just shops for people to go to, or restaurants for people to go to. But other than that I think there is going to be tremendous influx of industry. Any type of industry, and type of business that will associate itself with the area, because of the types of people who will be coming here. I mean the types of people who go to a museum of contemporary art are more (--) I don't really like to label, but it's more going to be a yuppie crowd. It's going to be you know, wealthy, young people. And um, and that can do nothing but help. And if they bring in new businesses, they say wow, look it, North Adams has got this great museum. This is a great place. Look, there's nothing here. We start a business here we can just do terrific things. And then all of a sudden there are you know, 500 jobs for 500 people who had lousy jobs before the museum was there. And so for the people who live here it's going to provide a lot, a lot of better jobs. I think it's also going to build to city up a lot too. You know there's a lot of lousy areas in the city now. [S: Yeah] [Comment unclear]

S: Uh, there's also been talk about, what about the poor? I mean are they going to be like driven out of North Adams?

E: Um, I think that they're (--) It's kind of a two fold situation. Um, the rise in the cost of living will probably be pretty big, but at the same time the amount of jobs created by new industry coming in with the museum will I think offset that. And the, I think the problem will be housing more than anything else. Um, because I think there will be jobs. I think they'll be better paying jobs too. Um, they'll be a lot of waitress type jobs um, that might not be as great, but um, but I think that overall it's better to have an okay job than not have a job, which is the case now for a lot of people. And I think the problem is going to be housing though. It's going to be affordable housing. And if the city has to pay for more housing projects, I think it's worth it to bring the

industry in and pay for the projects. Because I think you're helping more people than you are hurting overall.

S: As you were growing up in North Adams, or Williamstown, do you have anything, any stories, or anything as you were growing up?

E: I think, I remember when I first went to Pine Coble I was twelve. And I remember talking to one of the girls who was at school there. And she asked me where I lived. And I said, North Adams. And she was from Williamstown. And um, and she just made this awful comment. You know, like ooh, that place. You know, it was like oh, isn't that the place with all of the yucky houses when you drive. It's you know, I mean it was just this awful comment. And um, I felt like I was about two inches tall, because I you know, I was only twelve. What was I suppose to say? And I remember you know, going home and telling my parents how much I hated living here and how awful it was. And just, I mean everything. It was so awful. I felt so bad. And it's, I don't know, like it's just like I just remember my parents telling me about how at least when you live in North Adams everything is real. Because the person who was giving me a hard time about living in North Adams makes, well her parents make less money than mine. And it was just, it was one of those things. I mean what was I suppose to do? I don't know, I was twelve.

But um, but I think you know, my parents went through this whole big shpeil about how you know, you should have a better perspective on what's, what's going on. And um, and it's one of those things where like even now, like I have some friends who are, live in Williamstown, because when I worked at the gulf course I met some of the people you know, my age who live there. And um, and every once in awhile a little comment will slip out. Like, oh, that's North Adams. Like a style of dress, or something like (--) You know, if it's jeans and a t-shirt, well then it must be North Adams, because in Williamstown we wear polos and cachies. And um, and it's just like little comments like that that really set me off. Because number one, it shouldn't matter. And number two, I think that a lot of people have a false, false image about you know, about their self worth. You know, just because I live in Williamstown, I'm great. Or just because I live in North Adams, I'm lousy. Even like this year, like with our high school, how we have more kids from our graduating class get into good schools than Mt. Greylock, which is this rich community which supposedly has this wonderful education system. And it was our kids who got in. And I think that that just shows that it doesn't really matter how much money you have, it's just how hard you try.

I don't know, I guess, I guess that's just like one of the overwhelming attitudes I have now. That I'm older and I see it in perspective. When I was little I hated that. I would have done anything to get out of here, but um, but now that I'm older, not quite an adult, but almost. Just like, I think that I just, I think I have a better view as to why it's not that important you know, how much money you have, or you know, how much does your dad make, or things like that. I mean I can't stand it when people give me a hard time because of where I live. Because I mean I have a nice house and I don't think I should feel badly because I have a nice house. But you know, I don't go around telling everyone at school that I have a nice house, you know? [Both laugh] It's just you know, it's just like one of those things where I just think that one of the best, one of the best indicators of how good a person is, is are they able to hide what they've got? Because you know, I have like, I have a couple of relatives who like live in New York city who have so much money that it makes me sick. And it's like one of them, I didn't even know until like two years ago that this man was wealthy, because every time you see him he's wearing jeans.

And you know, he just comes up and he hangs out and you know, he plays ball with the kids and stuff. And that, I think that's an attitude more people should take. I don't think that people should have that attitude that it's a big deal if you have a lot of money. I mean none of my grandparents have money. And you know, they try to like you know, give me these great Christmas presents and they're always awful. I mean, but it doesn't mean that I think that they're awful because they don't have money. And I think that's the way people view North Adams. It's just you know, you don't have money so you've an awful person. And I just, and it all just makes me sick, because I think it's ridiculous.

S: Uh, you have a lot of friends from Williamstown right? [E: Umhm] Do you hang around more with people in Williamstown than you do with friends in North Adams that go to Drury?

E: It's kind of (--) During the summer I usually spend more time in Williamstown, because I've worked there and I'm working there again this year. It just happens to be where my job is. But um, but, so I'm there anyway. And I've met the kids, I'm met a lot of them through sports too, or just you know. And I, there's a couple of kids I know from Adams too who play sports. And you know, I see them during the summer. During the school year I usually spend most of my time with Drury kids. But um, like my best friend who has been my best friend since I was twelve lives in Williamstown. And it just happens to be like you know, I went to school there and you know, she was my best friend. And so we're still best friends. And she lives in Williamstown. So I'm there. But at the same time I mean she'll come and hang around in North Adams. You know, and we'll go out with my friends from North Adams too. But it's (--) I don't know. People, they do basically the same thing everywhere. You know when you hang out with Williamstown kids it's not like you do anything different than you do if you're hanging around with North Adams kids. Basically you're just doing nothing.

You're sitting in a house hanging around, you know? But it's no different. I guess I like them both about the same.

S: Do your friends you know, [unclear], do they ever give you like trouble, or like say anything like wise comments about, oh, how you were at Pine Coble or you go to Williamstown a lot, or you have a lot of friends in Williamstown?

E: Well when I first got to Drury and I was a freshman, I got a really hard time from some people about going to Pine Coble, because it was a prep school. And I mean that was like the worst thing in the world. Now all I wanted to do, I wanted just to scream, "it wasn't my decision, my parents made me go there." Because that's what it was. I didn't want to go there, because I didn't want to leave my friends. And it turned out to be great. And I loved it. But like when I first got to Drury everybody, like half the people wouldn't even talk to me, because they automatically thought I was a snob just because I went to school there. I was like, well you don't even know me. And part of my problem was like when I first got to school I was really shy, which now I'm definitely not shy. When I first got to school I was so quiet. And I just sat there and I never talked to anyone. And instead of saying, "oh she's shy and she doesn't know anyone," everybody said, "oh, she's a snob because she went to Pine Coble." And um, so I think that like the prejudice goes both ways. I mean people look down on North Adams, but some people in North Adams look down upon other places. Like, oh they have, they're snobs. And they don't even know them, but they're snobs. And I think that that's a problem. But now, well

first of all you know, I've got pretty good relationships with my friends from Drury anyway. So they know that it's not like I'm leaving them to you know, go be with these other people. And also I think that a lot of my Drury friends are friends with the kids from Williamstown too. So you know, we, we all just hang around together. There's, there's a lot of times when we'll all be at the same place. And like my boyfriend had a party like in February and there were probably thirty-five kids there. And I would say it was half Williamstown and half North Adams. And everybody got along great. And it's just, it's not a big deal anymore. It was before they knew me, but now it's not. Now nobody cares. [Laughs] Just like, oh.

S: Did you have to act, or did you act like differently? Like in the beginning when, like when you were a freshman here, because so many people were giving you a hard time?

E: Well I think it was more like a lot of people were giving me a hard time behind my back. Like they weren't looking at me saying you're a snob. And I just, I'd hear it from people who were my friends. And at first, at first it used to really upset me. I mean I remember crying one time, because I was like you know, they don't even know me. And you know, I was so upset about it, because it just (--) I was just like you know, if they know me and they don't like me, that's fine. But if they don't like me just because of where I went to school they're out of their minds, you know? [Laughs] And I was really upset about it. And then a few of my friends started giving me a hard time. Like one of my friends would always say, "oh yeah, the Collins mansion", because I had a big house. And it was like a friend on mine. And so I'm like, "oh my God, this is how people view me. This is awful!" And he was just kidding around. He was like totally not serious. And we you know, we went out all of the time and he was great. But it really got to me. So after that I mean I think I would downplay everything I had. I mean I'd be like, oh no, no, you know, we don't. We really don't have a big house. And I mean that was dumb, because that was a lie, because we do have a big house. [Laughs] I mean you know, but I think I tried to go too far the other way because I didn't want to be looked at as a snob. And then finally I'd say, probably at the end of my sophomore year I was just like, this is ridiculous. I'm the you know. And I just started to say like everybody, everybody knows you know, where I live and everybody knows how I am. And if they don't like me that's their problem, because you know, my best friends in the world might have nothing. I mean like Jeff gives me such a hard time because of where I live, but Jeff is one of my best friends in the world and I know it doesn't matter to him. So now I just let it go. Now, you know, if anything now we joke about it. And you know, I'll turn it back on them, you know. And talk about how my ancestors came over on the Mayflower, which is a bunch of crap. [Laughs] But um, you know, I turn it around now because it's just become a big joke.

S: From going to school in, at you know, Pine Coble, they have um, better, you learn more at Pine Coble than you do at Drury? I mean it's better I assume?

E: When I came to Drury I knew a lot more than the kids who came out of middle school. Just I think, I don't think it's the fault of the public school, because I think that if I went to public school in Williamstown it would have been the same thing. I don't think I would have learned anymore. I think it's just the fact that it was a private school and that we were advanced in everything. I mean in middle school you don't really get separated by ability that much. At Pine Coble you did. So you know, when I came into my freshman year I had already read Macbeth

and Julius Caesar and I had already you know, done certain books that I read this year, you know. And I think it was more, it was just more broad based, but I don't think it was the fault of you know, the North Adams public schools. I think it was just that the school I went to happened to be really good.

S: Is um, do you think that that's probably the reason why maybe you're um, third in your class? You are third in your class, right?

E: Yeah. Um, it's weird, because my parents give me a hard time, because they're like (--) I really don't work. I did, I didn't work at all in my freshman year, because I had done everything before. My freshman year was like a repeat of eighth grade for me, because everything (--) Like my science class I had already done in seventh grade. My english class I had already done in like seventh grade and eighth grade together. And um, my history class was a little different, but almost everything (--) And so I just like breezed through that year because I just you know, it's not like I was that smart, I just knew everything already because they had already taught it to me. So I've never even had to worry about it. And my sophomore year and my junior year it was different, because that was like all new stuff. And so that was when I, I started to have to like, "oh my gosh, I have to do homework now." And I use to do that. But um, at Pine Coble they taught you how to study, which is something they don't do in a public school. And um, like my sixth grade year, I mean we used to have to take notes on everything. I mean I could probably take notes better than anyone in the world. We used to be graded on our notes. Just like are they organized and can you study from what you've done. And things like that. So that by the time I was a sophomore I already knew how to study. And that's when other people were learning how to study. So I was at an advantage when I went into that, except for people like Harold who are so smart [laughs] that you know, it makes me sick. But um, but I already knew how to study. And I think that was like half the battle. And I already (--) And I had so much less work when I came to Drury than I had already done, because I used to get like three hours of homework a night. And the kids at middle would only get like a half hour, and that was a lot. And so when I went from my three hours to an hour and a half, that was nothing to me. I thought, "oh, this is great." And everybody else went from a half hour to an hour and a half and they were just like, "oh, this is awful. I'm never going to do this," you know. So it's just the difference in background. Of course this year I haven't done anything. I'm lucky I haven't slipped. [Laughs] But, but I think it's just you know, what I came out of. But you know, I don't think that it's because of lack of ability, I just think it's lack of experience. There are a lot of smart kids.

S: Did people also have a different opinion of you also? Besides going to school in Williamstown and now that you're third in your class and you didn't have to like, you already knew half of the stuff. And did people like give you any trouble about that?

E: I think it's weird, because we have a really smart class. And the two people who are in front of me are smarter than me without a doubt. And but, I think one of the things I've never done is like down play my own intelligence, because I hate it when other people do that. It's like, "oh I got an A on a test, but it was really lucky." And you know that person is really smart. And of course they're going to get an A on the test. And you know, I don't think that it's right of someone to down play something they're good at. So um, I don't know. I think that I am smart enough to be where I am. I mean I think that if I didn't have all of that other stuff I might be

third anyway, just because I am smart enough to do well. But I think it's hard for a lot of people, because a lot of people work so hard and don't do as well. And I think that that makes them upset. But I think a lot of it (--) I think a lot of it also is just they're upset at the fact that I've had a better experience with things, you know. They know that I've already been through it. So they're like "God, you know, I've got to go through it now, it's not fair." But I don't think they take it out on me, I just think that they feel bad to themselves, because no one has ever been mad at me because I got good grades. No. There's only been a real competition with like one person at school. And um, and that was more like me saying, "I'm not really going to compete". And the other person saying they were going to compete. And I mean I was happy I did better, but it's not like I tried to do better. And then like the people who are in front of me, I just like hey, all of the power to you. You're smarter than me, you know. [Laughs] You know, it's like, you know, I hope you do well. But I don't think anybody is jealous of that. At least they haven't told me. I don't know, maybe they are. [Laughs]

S: Okay. At Drury High School what kind of activities, or sports, or anything you've been involved with for the past four years?

E: Well I've been involved with sports. And I think that those are great at any school. Just you know, because it provides people with an opportunity to, well first of all just to be with other people, different types of people that they might not be with in the classroom. And I think that it's also, it teaches them like a work ethic, you know, you have to go to practice and you have to work hard and everything. Um, so those, but those were just fun to me. It's not, you know, I'm not going to go out and be a professional soccer player, or something. But um, but I think basically at school the activities that are most important to me are the government activities. Like uh, student council, which is kind of a dead organization. We tried to, we tried to revitalize it. That's pretty important, because I think that you should have a governing body. Ours doesn't govern to well. I wish it did. But um, but I think the biggest thing that I do, the most important thing I do is being on the school committee, because you have to have a student rep by law. And so I sit there on the school committee. And the only thing I don't do is vote. I can talk. You know, I sit at the table and I do all that stuff. And the best part is that they listen to me. And I think that it's good for the students, because the adults listen to a student perspective. And uh, in North Adams I mean there's a big problem with teenage pregnancy and things like that. And when a health curriculum was under debate last year everyone was saying, "oh, I think the health films are a little too harsh. I don't think we ought to show them." And because I was a student I sat on the board and I said, "no. Look, this needs to be done. This is not harsh. Look at all the kids who are doing everything that they're doing in our school." And they listened to me. And I think so that was, that was important. And the next person who does it next year is going to have the same, you know, responsibility. And it's a lot of fun too, because you know, after awhile you're like the little kid. And it's almost like they protest you and everything. And they really listen to you. So it's pretty neat to be able to do that. And other than that the only other thing is like, peer education. I think it's great, because um, we go into like middle school and elementary schools and we talk to kids about drugs and alcohol and sex. We try to avoid that at all cost. But we talk to them about all sorts of different stuff. And I think it's a great program, because it's a bunch of very responsible high school students. And the difference is, it's not like SAD, where they say, "don't do something". I think SAD is great, but SAD says don't. Peer leaders, we don't talk about drinking and driving, but we do talk about like drinking. And we won't say, "don't do

it." We'll say, "learn enough about it to make a responsible decision." And we stress not doing it. But there's a bunch of kids like on the group who would drink, or something like that, but the stress is being responsible. And I think that's a terrific program in North Adams, especially since you know, people would tend to say we have a lot of social problems. But um, but I think that that's a great program. And that I think we get to the younger kids too, because we're not teachers preaching to them. We're kids, but we're high school kids. So they look up to us. And so I think it works out pretty well. And they trust us. They tell us a lot of things. And we can get help for them if they tell us.

S: Okay. Well this is going a little off the topic, but staying with the welfare you know, people in North Adams. Do you (--) How do you feel about um (--) Well actually it's been said that they steal, well not steal, but take money from the government, but they don't really need it. [E: Umhm] What are your views on that?

E: Um, I think that there's a huge segment of North Adams that is on welfare, receiving welfare. And um, I think that welfare is a really good program. And I'm very aware that they're (--) I mean I know people who cheat (--)

SIDE ONE ENDS

SIDE TWO BEGINS

E: I think that cheating the system is wrong, because you end up hurting the other people who are trying to do it fairly. You know, and it also comes under great criticism from other people and all that does is hurt the people who really you know, need the money and are abiding by all of the rules and are doing everything they're suppose to do. And I think that's wrong, because it's hurting them. Um, but I think that welfare, it provides a stable force. And for a lot of people it's an important force. And it's people who, who are trying really hard. And it's not their fault that they live in an area where they might not be able to get a good job, whatever. And I think that you know, I've been traditionally a conservative person who said you know, "God, it's awful people who cheat the system and everything." And I still feel that way about people who do cheat, or people who not necessarily cheat, but just are kind of very lackadaisical about it and expect it to happen. But um, I think for those people who are trying really hard, I think it's, it's a really good program. Because you know, it's a stabilizing force. They can keep themselves on their feet and they're trying really hard. And they deserve it for trying hard. And you know, North Adams, it's an area where you know, they're aren't a lot of jobs right now. At least not a lot of well paying jobs. You know you can get a job making you know, \$4.50 an hour at Burger King, but you can't raise a family on that. And so I think that welfare is, is good. And I think like the housing projects are good, because they again provide something that is desperately needed in this area. And I think that a lot of the people who are, who are in the projects are working really hard. And if you're working really hard then you deserve something for it. And I think that they're really good. I think they're beneficial to everybody.

S: What about the people who are cheating the system? What do you think should be done

about that?

E: If I were someone cheating the system, I would like to put them in a room for an hour with someone who is not cheating the system. And have to have them sit in a chair and listen to the other person scream at them for you know, hours or something. Just um, because they're, they're not, they're not hurting the tax payer all that much. I mean they are, I'm the sort of person I'm totally against taxes and all of this stuff. But um, but they're not hurting you know, the wealthy person as much as they're hurting another person who is in the same situation. And if the person is on welfare to begin with, they know what it's like not to have something. And for that person to turn around and take something you know, that someone else needs, I have very little tolerance for. I think that that's absolutely awful. And you know, it's like scholarships. It's like applying for a scholarship when you don't need a scholarship. That's not fair to a person who needs a scholarship. And um, I think that if caught those people ought to get in some deep trouble, because you know, they're not hurting anyone except for the people who are in a similar situation, who are just honest and really need it.

S: Okay. Before I finish this interview, is there anything else you'd like to say. Closing comments about anything that we've discussed?

E: I think that all I'd say about North Adams is that it has a terrific future. And I think that people, people are kind of narrow minded when they think (--) When they think North Adams, all they think is economic depression. And all they think is underclass. And I don't think that they think of the tremendous like life force that's here. I mean we've been economically depressed for an incredibly long time, but we're still here. I mean we're, you know, we're still trying to make it better. And that shows something about the people who live here. And I think that those people who are oppose to the museum don't understand how much good can come out of that. If the museum goes through, which I'm confident it will. If Greylock [unclear] goes through, which is a little more controversial that the museum, if that goes through I think what you're looking at is a tremendous change in North Adams. You are looking at a lot of money. You're looking at a lot of jobs. And you're looking at a whole revitalization of the area, which is incredibly important. And um, I think that it can only be a positive force. I think it will definitely out weigh any negative ramifications. And just that this is a great place to be. And um, it's certainly someplace that you know, if I were a parent and I had to raise my child, I'd love to raise him in a place like this. And I think that you know, in perhaps twenty years after the museum is built and after it has time to have an affect, people are going to look at North Adams and just say wow! Because it's going to be a booming city like it was you know, a hundred years ago.

S: Okay, thank you. This concludes our interview.

TAPE ENDS